



**T**raditionally, and rather consistently, staff development for teachers has focused on short-term workshops, sessions or presentations often conducted through meetings or conferences. The primary purpose of this approach was to change or improve teacher practices in order to increase student achievement. In general, there were few connections made between new knowledge gained from these workshops and classroom applications, and subsequently, no way to know if staff development influenced student achievement or was sustained over time.

Recently, the approach to staff development has begun to look quite different, although the purpose remains the same. The new focus, moving away from conventional professional development toward job-embedded staff development, gives teachers ongoing support and can be more individualized to teacher needs and settings (National Staff Development Council, 2001). Staff development is seen as having more continuity and is structured to address individual teachers' classroom work, specific grade levels, academic content and research-based methods. This approach is touted as having greater potential to improve what teachers do and to impact student achievement more positively—that is, it develops instructional capacity that is sustainable within and across school settings.

### **Professional Development and Reading Instruction**

Over the past five years, the aim of using scientifically based reading research (SBRR) to guide reading instruction for young children has been to improve student achievement in reading. The work of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) served as the foundation for this initiative. Results for 9-year-olds from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005) indicated a significant increase in their reading scores while results for 13- and 17-year-olds basically remained the same. Although it is unclear what the cause of these results might be, many cite the implementation of Reading First (2004), which targeted reading instruction based on SBRR for kindergarten through third graders.

A critical piece of the Reading First legislation is the requirement that schools receiving grants provide professional development for teachers on SBRR and the implementation of reading instruction around five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension. A significant feature related to staff development that appears to have flourished from both the research and the legislation is the use of literacy or reading coaches to support teachers in improving their practices (International Reading Association, 2004; Hall, 2004; Neufeld & Roper, 2003).





New reading initiatives in adult education programs are focusing on improving reading instruction for adults. Many of these initiatives are based on the work of The Reading Research Working Group, a panel of experts on reading research and practice, convened by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). This group evaluated the existing research in adult reading instruction and provided a summary of scientifically based principles and practices in the publication, *Research-based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction* (Kruidenier, 2002).

Unlike Reading First, there is no mandate for adult educators to use this summary of research to guide their instructional practices in their classrooms with adult students. Additionally, there is little funding for intensive professional development to help adult educators understand the research and the use of research-based practices in reading instruction with their students. However, adult education teachers, who have extremely varied educational backgrounds, often need this type of professional development most.

How might staff development that is focused on research-based reading instruction be implemented with adult education teachers? Is it reasonable to adapt staff development based on what has worked for elementary, middle, and high school teachers? Is literacy coaching a feasible staff development feature in adult education?

### **The Kentucky Adult Education Pilot Project**

NCFL is working with a group of adult education teachers in Kentucky on a one-year pilot test (2005-2006), with funding from Kentucky Adult Education, Council on Postsecondary Education.

The goals of the project are to improve reading instruction and learner outcomes for adults in the pilot programs and to test the effectiveness of the following assessment/instructional strategies and staff development services:

- Teacher training and technical assistance based on assessment and instructional strategies outlined in NCFL's publication, *Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults: First Steps for Teachers* (McShane, 2005), a book devel-

oped as part of an initiative funded by the National Institute for Literacy

- On-site support, provided by a reading coach, for one half of the teachers (Group A)

NCFL staff are providing training, resource materials, and learner-assessment assistance for 16 adult education teachers representing urban and rural counties in the state. A reading coach is working with one-half of the teachers throughout the project year, providing instructional and assessment support.

*Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults* (McShane, 2005) and related training are based on recent syntheses of the research on reading instruction and introduce instructional strategies with solid evidence of effectiveness. The book and training focus on the need for *explicit* instruction in reading components identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) and the Reading Research Working Group (Kruidenier, 2002). Participating teachers have been introduced to the reading skills development process, from beginning reading to more advanced comprehension-based instruction, so they can understand the varied causes of individuals' reading comprehension problems, including weak decoding skills, lack of fluency, and limitations in vocabulary, background knowledge, or comprehension strategies.

Project outcomes are currently being assessed, but several features of this project appear to hold promise for sustainability:

- Extensive training (four full days initially, spaced out over six weeks, and another day later in the school year)
- On-site learner-assessment assistance
- A print resource written for adult education teachers with diverse settings in mind

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- On-site instructional coaching
- Instructional resources developed by the project staff for participating teachers and learners

This project is an excellent opportunity to learn about “what works” in adult education professional development. Results to date are encouraging. Given the broad variety of reading needs among adult learners, their complicated lives and irregular class attendance, and the often less-than-optimal learning conditions in multi-level groups, NCFL staff feel the approaches tested in this project show promise.

For additional information about the project, contact Susan McShane at [smcshane@famlit.org](mailto:smcshane@famlit.org).

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